

Office of East Asian Analysis
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE


21 January 1983

NOTE FOR: NIO/EA

Dave,

Attached is the paper we prepared for you on East Asian perceptions of Soviet intentions in the region. I hope it fills your needs. As you need additional, last-minute items for the Shultz trip that we may not be working on already, please call.

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Acting Director

Attachment

Source

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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East Asian Perceptions of Soviet Intentions

East Asian perceptions of Soviet intentions are shaped in large measure by a pervasive sense of suspicion, a feeling shared even by Moscow's one regional client, Hanoi. With varying degrees of concern, all believe that Moscow is intent on becoming an East Asian power, primarily by attempting to derive political influence from its growing military capabilities. Indeed, Moscow's one major success in Asia--its alliance with Vietnam--stemmed from its ability to provide major security assistance. The tendency to avoid--and thereby isolate--Moscow should persist as long as a credible Soviet military power continues to exist.

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China. The Chinese since the 1960s have been convinced that the broad thrust of Soviet policy in East Asia as well as the rest of the world is at odds with Chinese interests. Beijing tends to characterize Soviet actions and intentions from the Afghanistan invasion to the continued occupation of Japan's northern territories as part of a Soviet plan to encircle and dominate China. It is this perception--along with their growing awareness of China's economic and military weakness--that prompted the Chinese to seek a relationship with the West and the United States that would counterbalance Soviet pressure. If the Chinese were to draw up a balance sheet, they probably would be generally satisfied with the improved nature of their relations with the

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This memorandum was prepared by the Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to [redacted] Deputy Chief, Northeast Asia Division, OEA, [redacted]

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United States, Japan, the ASEAN countries, and North Korea since the early 1970s. On the deficit side of the ledger, they would be particularly concerned about the USSR's ties with Vietnam, which have given Moscow access and influence in an area the Chinese have historically considered one in which their interests should predominate. Recent Chinese efforts to reduce tensions with the USSR reflect Beijing's desire to improve its maneuverability with both the Soviet Union and the United States, not a change in its view of Soviet intentions or capabilities.

Japan. The Japanese see the Soviet Union as relatively isolated in East Asia, partly because of the better relationships that exist among the United States, China, and Japan. In Tokyo's view, Moscow has tried to compensate by warning Beijing, Washington, and Tokyo that it would view the creation of an anti-Soviet coalition as extremely threatening, and by continuing to strengthen its military forces in Siberia, the Maritime Provinces, and the Western Pacific. The Japanese, however, do not believe Moscow intends to use its formidable strategic or conventional forces in Asia any time in the near future. Tokyo does believe that the USSR is working to break out of its isolation. The Japanese, however, conclude that there is little likelihood that the Soviets will make the concessions on the Northern Territories necessary to achieve a major breakthrough in their relations with Japan, but that instead Moscow's first priority will be to improve relations with China.

South Korea. Seoul views the Soviets as a potential danger based on its memories of Soviet support for North Korea during the Korean War. This perception has been reinforced by Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet backing of the Vietnamese Communists, and the large Soviet naval buildup in the Pacific. At the same time, Seoul recognizes that Moscow has exercised restraint in dealing with North Korea--refusing to supply P'yongyang with advanced weapons, for example. The South Koreans also have been flattered by Moscow's recent tentative probes and intrigued by the prospect of possible economic cooperation. Nonetheless, such considerations are generally overshadowed by Seoul's assessment of the risks. Seoul has recently shown renewed interest in cross recognition of the two Koreas by the major powers. Seoul may not believe there is any real chance of success for cross recognition of the two Koreas at this point, but rather may hope to head off any lesser, unilateral moves by Washington or Tokyo that could damage Seoul's position.

Vietnam. The Soviet Union is Vietnam's leading aid source and trading partner, as well as its primary arms supplier. Hanoi relies on Soviet support in its confrontations with the Chinese. The relationship between Hanoi and its patron, however, is not warm. Vietnamese complaints about insufficient Soviet aid

are balanced by Moscow's grumbling that Vietnam wastes the aid it receives. More recently the Vietnamese have been increasingly concerned that the Soviet Union might undermine the Vietnamese position in Kampuchea^{25X1} to obtain an accommodation with the Chinese.

ASEAN. Singapore is the most outspoken member of ASEAN concerning the Soviet threat to Southeast Asia. Although quite willing to engage in commercial dealings with the Soviets, the Singaporeans remain suspicious of Soviet intentions and carefully monitor Soviet activity within the city-state. Thailand, as the front line state directly facing Vietnamese-occupied Kampuchea, remains fearful of a Soviet-backed Vietnam and mistrustful of Soviet intentions in the region. The Philippine government is less concerned over direct Soviet expansion in the region than its front-line ASEAN partners. Nevertheless, Manila has repeatedly rejected Soviet overtures for an increased presence in the Philippines and is wary of possible Soviet efforts to forge links with antigovernment groups. Both Indonesia and Malaysia see China as the greatest long-term threat to Southeast Asia, but have focused most their concern on the USSR since Vietnam invaded Kampuchea. The uncovering of Soviet spy rings in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore during the past two years has reinforced suspicions of Moscow.

Australia/New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand have maintained virtually a cold war stance toward the USSR since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They see Soviet backing of Vietnamese activities in Kampuchea as the major regional threat. Their deep suspicion of Moscow is also reflected in their concern over limited Soviet activity in the area of special interest to them, the neighboring South Pacific.

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SUBJECT: East Asian Perceptions of Soviet Intentions

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